

A first time for everything

Like any good long-distance race, we are now into the final sprint with the season of Advent well under way. As the saying goes, 'Christmas comes but once a year', but in reality the buildup appears to begin earlier and earlier.

Each of us will engage in the countdown in a variety of ways and on a varying scale. Most of us I imagine, end up somewhere between on the one hand wanting the festivities to run the entire 365 days of the calendar year, to on the other taking the view that even Mr Scrooge needed to rein it a little in that he let his excitement for the season run away with himself.

In many respects there seems to be the need to reinvent the season every time it comes around. We see it on the high street; in the various television adverts and Christmas specials; the Christmas lights adorning many homes; even within the activities and events of the church. Each year has to bring something new and different. In these and many other ways there seems to be this desire to always out-do and well and truly upstage last year's attempts.

Recently I came across the quote, 'Advent is the hush in the theatre between the house lights going down and the curtain going up'. It struck a chord and has stayed with me as I've mulled it over. Amidst the chaos and busyness of the season, at its heart Advent is a time to prepare for the arrival of the Son of God.

There is nothing new about the Bible readings that tell the story of the birth of Jesus. As we read them this weekend and over the coming weeks, and as they are read and listened to around the world this Advent, they are the same as they were last year, as they were the year before, as they will be in the years to come. The text on the page doesn't change. It might be a different translation, it might be read on a phone instead of a printed book, but it's the same story, the same truths of God's grace, hope, generosity and love that are being shared.

However, the impact that the Christmas story can have is ever fresh, vibrant and new. I believe in part it's how we read it that shapes its effect – in terms of the expectations that we have. If we listen to or read the Christmas story found in the bible as if it is something we've heard a hundred times before, then we are less likely to find anything new within it.

However if we determine in ourselves, to meet afresh the new born King, to see God's purposes unfurl before us, then I believe God will not disappoint. Whatever understanding or experience we have of the Christmas story, let us seek to prepare to encounter the newborn King as those shepherds, the wise men, and as Mary and Joseph did in Bethlehem all those years ago - as if it is the first time. Through God's Holy Spirit may we meet with Him afresh, as we celebrate the birth of His Son, Jesus - who came to save us all.

Be blessed

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